

Homily for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Times

September 2-3, 2017

Readings: Jeremiah 20:7-9; Romans 12: 1-2; Matthew 16: 21-27

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If you've ever looked at the ancient Chinese document called the *Tao* of LaoTse, you'll remember finding in it such apparently contradictory statements as "To be strong, one must be soft," "To stand straight, one must bend," "To receive, one must give." The *Tao* is full of such contradictions which make sense only to the wise, the daring and loving.

In today's first reading (Jeremiah 20.7-9), Jeremiah is bemoaning the fact that God tricked him into being God's spokesman. The bittersweet experience of Jeremiah is that even though he is the object of scorn, he cannot run away from God, because God's name had become like a fire burning in his heart.

In the Gospel, Peter thinks his words of bravado and encouragement will lighten the pained heart of Jesus. But, no. Instead, Jesus turns on Peter and accuses him of not thinking as God does.

What these readings tell us is that following God's call is costly. At times, we have to do the opposite of what looks good or easy or appropriate. In our lives, we are tempted, as Peter was, to avoid suffering and to escape death. But God's ways include losing our life in order to find it in all its fullness.

Jesus suffered. We know that from the Gospel. And those who follow Him must be willing to suffer as well. For us, suffering is an inevitable, inescapable part of discipleship – not self-inflicted suffering or suffering we choose to make a certain point, but unbidden suffering that comes to us in life and in which we recognize the companionship of Jesus.

In his Letter to the Romans, Paul tells us to be transformed by the renewal of our minds. Part of that transformation has to do with learning to recognize those moments when God is very close and God's tenderness enfolds us. Maybe then our hearts will burn as Jeremiah's did, and like

Jesus, we will be given for the many. Then, life with Christ will be rich beyond all expectation.

Christ's call to us is certainly personal, but He also calls us to be part of the transformation of society, culture and everyday living. So, on this Labor Day weekend, as we look back on the stunningly divisive national events of the last several weeks, we recognize that the suffering of Jesus—in the name of salvation for all—is real among us. May the same fire burn in us as it did in Jeremiah, a revolution of our hearts, if need be. We pray for the transformation of the American mind to uphold justice, inclusion and peace for all who live here or come here.